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ABSTRACT

The early consequences of compulsory transfer of children from ghetto schools to predominately white schools is discussed. Such a plan was effected when Jones Elementary School, with an 80% black enrollment, was closed and pupils were reassigned to six predominately white receiving schools. Non-transfer students from a racially mixed school and comparable socioeconomically and academically to the children from Jones School were used as a control group. The data included information on a variety of behavioral and attitudinal characteristics such as IQ, reading achievement, self-esteem and social acceptance. The findings indicated that these characteristics were initially poorest in the black transfer group and there was no evidence that established patterns were altered appreciably by a year of desegregated schooling. Black children tended to be more similar to one another across the three populations than to white children within the same population and the black-white differences tended to favor the whites. When some interruption in this pattern was observed, positive changes occurred among the black transfer group and generally the greatest positive changes occurred in children with relatively low initial status on that characteristic. It is concluded that desegregation is no panacea for the ills of the minority group child. (Author/RSM)

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Some Early Effects of Compulsory Desegregation on Elementary School Children[1]

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The present study deals with one kind of solution to de facto segregation: compulsory transfer of children from ghetto schools to predominantly white schools.

Such a plan was put into effect in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1965, when Jones elementary school, with an 80% black enrollment, was closed. Pupils from that school were reassigned, on a geographic basis, to six receiving schools, all but one far enough from the Jones area to require busing. The average nonwhite enrollment for the six schools was less than 3%; some of them enrolled no black children prior to the transfer.

The study is concerned with the early consequences of this action. It was begun in the spring of 1965, when extensive baseline data were gathered on children in grades K-5. Taking part in this special data collection were children from Jones school, from the six receiving schools, and from a racially mixed school contiguous with the Jones district. The population of that school, approximately 50% black, included substantial numbers of children who were comparable socioeconomically and academically to the children from Jones school,

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and who would not experience a change in school setting the next year. This last population will be referred to as the nontransfer group.

For the most part, children in the three populations were born in the midwest to native American parents who, at the time of the study, had resided in Michigan for an average of at least 15 years. Where background characteristics differed across populations, the differences tended to parallel differences in racial composition -- that is, they were greatest between the predominantly black transfer group and the predominantly white receiving-school group, with the nontransfer group generally falling somewhere between.

To illustrate, relatively fewer of the transfer children were living with both parents, while the highest proportion of children from intact families was found in the receiving schools. On the whole, the transfer children came from larger families, and lived in more crowded dwellings. Parents of the transfer children had the least formal education, on the average, and tended to be employed in lower status occupations; relatively more mothers in this group were employed outside the home.

However, none of the background factors we looked at, nor initial academic status, showed consistent significant differences among the three populations, at all grade levels, when comparisons were made among pupils of the same race and sex. On the other hand, comparisons of the total populations, which we'll focus on here, do allow such differences full play.

And it is to be expected that those differences are reflected in at least some of the outcome variables.

The design of the study provided for the children in all three populations to take part in a special testing program in the spring of the pretransfer year, and for their teachers to provide descriptive ratings of the children's behavior in school. Follow-up data were gathered early the next fall, soon after the transfer was implemented, and again the following spring. Parents of the transfer pupils were interviewed during the summer preceding the transfer, and again the following summer. The data collected provided information about initial status and early response to the transfer in terms of a variety of behavioral and attitudinal characteristics. Three of these -- reading achievement, self-esteem, and social acceptance -- were examined by the junior author two years later, in 40 black transfer children still in elementary receiving schools.

Turning to the findings, academic performance -- as measured by standardized tests of achievement and scholastic aptitude -- was initially poorest in the predominantly black transfer group, and there was no evidence from these tests that established performance patterns were altered appreciably by a year of desegregated schooling.

Half the transfer group gained in IQ over this period, and 37% made "normal" or greater-than-normal gains in reading, in terms of the test norms. But gains made by the transfer children

tended to be smaller, on the whole, than gains made by the other two groups. The 40 black transfer pupils studied two years later were at best holding their own in reading, relative to national norms. On the other hand, the greatest posttransfer gains occurred in the predominantly white receiving-school group, whose established above-average pattern of academic progress was in no way altered with the introduction of the transfer pupils into their classes.

Comparisons of reading scores for the transfer and nontransfer groups showed that at every grade level, the mean was somewhat higher for nontransfer pupils, before and after the transfer; and except at grades 1 and 4, the average gains were somewhat greater in that group. Comparisons of just the black children in these two groups, however, showed their average posttransfer scores to be identical at some grade levels; and where differences were observed, they favored the transfer group as often as the nontransfer group. Thus, predictably, achievement differences in the total populations reflected to a considerable extent their differing racial and socioeconomic composition.

And this was generally the case for all the variables we examined: black children tended to be more similar to one another, across the three populations, than to white children within the same population; and for all the variables studied, the direction of black-white differences tended to favor the white child. It should be said, too, however, that in those characteristics

where some interruption of this general pattern was observed, it was among black children in the transfer group that something positive seemed to be happening.

Self-esteem, as measured by a picture card sort in the youngest children and by the Coopersmith inventory beginning in grade 2, appeared to have been little affected by the early years of desegregated schooling. Transfer pupils gained in self-esteem over the first posttransfer year, but not subsequently, and their first-year gains were in most cases paralleled by gains in the other two groups.

Interpersonal relationships were studied sociometrically and via questionnaires. Not surprisingly, the transfer pupils appeared to have been slightly less well accepted by their predominantly white receiving-school classmates than they were the previous year by classmates at Jones school; and this continued to be true two years later for the smaller group studied then. Black transfer children appeared to be at least as well accepted by their new classmates as black children living in receiving-school neighborhoods, while white transfer children tended to be less well accepted, on the whole, than the white middle-class children native to the receiving schools. However, the transfer pupils' own perceptions of their peer relationships were consistently more positive for the posttransfer year than for the prior year at Jones school.

Motivation, as measured by self-report scales, was

initially lowest in the transfer group and showed little overall change at the end of the posttransfer year, although black transfer boys generally increased their scores sufficiently on one such measure to equal or exceed the scores of their counterparts in the other two groups. Black transfer boys likewise demonstrated a significantly greater posttransfer gain in achievement motivation.

Reactions to school, as expressed in a variety of questionnaire scales, indicated that the transfer group generally saw the "climate" of the receiving schools as less supportive than did children native to those schools, but more supportive than the climate of their previous school. And in most cases, black transfer pupils reported their classroom experience in the receiving schools to be at least as supportive as did black children living in receiving-school districts. Both before and after the transfer, the transfer pupils tended to rate their own classroom behavior as less acceptable than children in the other two groups rated theirs, and demonstrated less school-related anxiety -- though significantly greater general anxiety -- than children in the other two groups.

Behavior in school, as rated by teachers, was characterized in the transfer group by generally poorer classroom adjustment and a higher incidence of maladaptive behaviors, both before and after the transfer. However, encouraging posttransfer changes showed up in the ratings of several characteristics, suggesting a reduction in so-called neurotic behavior, in immaturity, in

symptoms of serious behavior disorders, and, among older children, in aggression. "Change" here must be interpreted cautiously, of course, since pre- and posttransfer ratings were supplied by different teachers, working in different settings.

Time does not permit much to be said about the rich interview data gathered from the transfer pupils and their parents. Expressed reactions to the transfer, however, indicate that 70% of the children and 55% of their parents held favorable expectations for the transfer beforehand; about the same number of children and slightly more parents viewed it positively a year later. Interestingly enough, parents perceived their children's attitudes toward the transfer as more positive than those reported by the children themselves. This was particularly striking at the end of the posttransfer year, when 92% of the parents reported their children's attitudes to be positive, compared with a 66% positive response from the children themselves.

A last finding of some importance is the fact that no general pattern of "successful" or "unsuccessful" response to the transfer could be identified within the transfer group. Posttransfer gains in one area tended to be relatively independent of those in other areas. Gains in reading and IQ, for example, were not significantly correlated with each other, or with changes in attitudes toward school, in motivation, or in social acceptance, as reflected in the measures we used.

Generally speaking, however, the greatest positive changes

in a given characteristic tended to occur in children with relatively low initial status on that characteristic. Thus, the greatest gains in IQ tended to occur among pupils with relatively low pretransfer IQs; the children best accepted by their receiving-school classmates tended to be those least well accepted by their former classmates at Jones school; the children showing the most positive changes in attitudes toward school tended to be those who had expressed relatively negative attitudes toward school the prior year.

On the whole, this finding appeared much too dramatic to be ascribed to statistical regression, and it suggests that children finding strong rewards and satisfactions in a segregated school may be the least likely to benefit from desegregation, while those responding poorly in a segregated setting may be the most promising candidates for desegregated schooling, at least in terms of early response.

It is important to remember that we have looked at these children only for a relatively short period of time -- one year, for most variables. Nonetheless, our data do support some tentative conclusions. Desegregation is clearly no panacea for the ills of the minority-group child. The evidence presented here suggests that it may be a more effective strategy for some children than for others, and that its primary early outcome may lie in attitudinal and overt-behavioral modifications which are perhaps fundamental to change in the more deeply ingrained response patterns reflected in such things as academic achievement

and self-esteem. The real challenge in desegregation may well lie in the schools' ability to capitalize on these early reactions to build the necessary supports for lasting change.

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